

ISSN 1476-1580



North West Geography

Volume 1, Number 1, 2001

The influence of the Gay Village on migration to central Manchester

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Abstract

Contemporary migration into city centres is linked to redevelopment, gentrification and changing lifestyles. The population of Manchester's city centre had fallen to only 800 in 1991, but had increased sixfold by 1999. A survey of single male households in the city centre suggested that about one quarter of the households are headed by gay males. Most of these males are young, arrived in the 1990s, and were attracted by the Gay Village. A further one quarter of the households are headed by 'straight' males who have many similar characteristics. However, both these groups are different from the pre-existing population of the city centre. This movement of young males to the city centre is seen as a pioneer migration, in which the role of gay men is significant.

Keywords

Manchester, Gay Village, gentrification, redevelopment, migration, gay men.

Introduction

Migration within cities in twentieth century has principally been from the city centres and inner city areas to the suburbs. This has been driven by a combination of increasing wealth, greater car ownership, the planned redevelopment of the central areas, and the desire of people to live in a more pleasant environment. The inner areas have been left either without population, or with a poor and/or ageing population usually living in lower status rented properties. There have been inflows of migrants to inner city areas in the last half-century, notably of young adults and immigrants, but these flows have not usually been to city centres themselves, but to the areas surrounding them. Where higher status (middle class) migrants have moved into a lower status area, the process of gentrification has often taken place. These migrants are usually young, and are moving for reasons related to work and the perceived city centre lifestyle. Many move after leaving home, and are single, or living together without children; they are the well-known DINKYs (double income, no kids yet). Students studying at city centre campuses form another important group of in-migrants.

The role of gay migrants in this movement has not been thoroughly investigated. Kath Weston (1995)

has dealt with migration from rural and small-town America to the big cities, John Binnie (1997) has dealt with international gay migration, and Bob Cant (1997) has edited a selection of 18 personal stories about gay migration in Britain. The reasons why gay men migrate to large urban areas such as Manchester are many and complex; like all migrations the reasons may be positive and/or negative. The negative (push) reasons apply mainly to the places where migrants come from; many rural, urban and suburban areas have no gay meeting places, and attitudes can appear (and be) homophobic. The positive (pull) reasons include the perception of larger cities as having a gay scene, more gay people, even a gay community, and perhaps a greater acceptance of gay people. The move is often tied in with an individual 'coming out' as gay. It is a commonplace that migrant groups tend to stick together; this applies to minority groups such as gays as much as to international migrants from the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent. This paper aims to look at the relationships between the growth of Manchester's Gay Village and the recent inflow of migrants to the city centre.

Manchester city centre is part of Central Ward¹, whose population declined by 32% between 1981 and 1991, to about 9000 (Figure 1). But within that ward

the population of the city centre had fallen to about 800 in 1991. The principal area which has since been redeveloped as housing lies along the Rochdale Canal, an area which had not had a significant resident population since the mid-nineteenth century; indeed many of the buildings were warehouses. By the 1960s this was a rundown part of the city centre, a 'zone of discard' left by the decline of the cotton industry; it had at least one positive advantage of a supply of cheap and vacant premises awaiting reuse. It lies next to the city centre, a commercial area, with around 100,000 jobs in the service and retailing sectors (i.e. offices, shops and leisure).

Redevelopment

Redevelopment in Manchester's city centre is an ongoing process; some elements have been planned by local councils (e.g. the urban regeneration of Castlefield, the Metrolink tram system), whilst others have been undertaken by the private sector. The growth of some developments, notably in the leisure industry (e.g. pubs, clubs, restaurants, and areas such as Chinatown and the Gay Village) are, at the outset, clearly spontaneous and not planned.

The creation of residences in the city centre can be seen as a key element in its redevelopment. Some 200 new apartments had been built in the city centre in the late 1970s, near the Science Museum at Castlefield. In the mid 1980s Piccadilly Village was created, with 125 town houses and flats adjacent to the Ashton Canal. Both these early developments were just outside the city centre. However, the creation of the Central Manchester Development Corporation (CMDC) in 1988, with most of its 'territory' along the south-east side of the Rochdale Canal, provided a further impetus to housing redevelopment in the area. This began in 1989 with the conversion of Lancaster House (apartments for sale) and India House (for rent) followed by Granby Village in 1990. Since then there has been a steady stream of new housing; 615 units were completed in 1993-97, with a further 692 under construction in 1998 (DTZ Pinda Consulting 1998, i). There is a mixture of new building schemes and refurbished commercial buildings, some for sale, others for rent; many have received public sector funding. Some of the housing associations with properties in the city centre (such as Tung Sing and Northern Counties) have been perceived to be gay friendly. In addition, several halls

of residence have been created for students studying at the city centre campuses of UMIST and Manchester Metropolitan University; some private developments have also been undertaken to cater for this market.

Strictly speaking, this is redevelopment rather than gentrification, as these premises were not formerly residential. Thus, much of the previous research on (gay) gentrification is of only indirect relevance, as most previous movements elsewhere had been to areas of lower status housing the city (Bouthillette 1994; Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985). The process occurring in Manchester could be described as gentrification of the area, not of the housing.

Much of the new housing in Manchester has been specifically aimed at gays, for example with half and full page advertisements for Manchester housing developments (both private and public) appearing the London-based gay press. Some of the property for sale is quite expensive; most are one-bedroom flats in the range £45-80k, but there are some two-bedroomed flats in the range £65-120k (1997). Canal Street was partly pedestrianised by the CMDC in the early 1990s; its 1992/93 *Annual Report* describes it as a 'canalside piazza ... close to the expanding Whitworth housing village'. Never once do the dreaded words 'gay' or 'Gay Village' appear in their Reports; for them this is 'Whitworth – the village in the city', an appellation never used by anyone else. The net result of this redevelopment is that the Manchester Council City Centre Team suggests that the core area population increased from 800 to around 5000 in the eight years from 1991 to 1999, a six-fold increase.

Manchester's Gay Village

Manchester's gay pubs and clubs began to emerge after the changes in the law which partially decriminalised homosexual activity in 1967. A concentration of gay pubs and clubs emerged between the adjacent Bloom Street and Canal Street, namely the Rembrandt, the New Union, and Napoleon's. The first use of the term 'Gay Village' was in the local magazine *Mancunian Gay* in 1984, though it was not until 1991 that the city planners referred specifically to the Gay Village as a separate planning area.

The left-wing Labour City Council became more pro-gay from 1984 (Quilley 1995). However, the real commercial growth of the area came after 1987, as part of the property-led urban regeneration of the time.

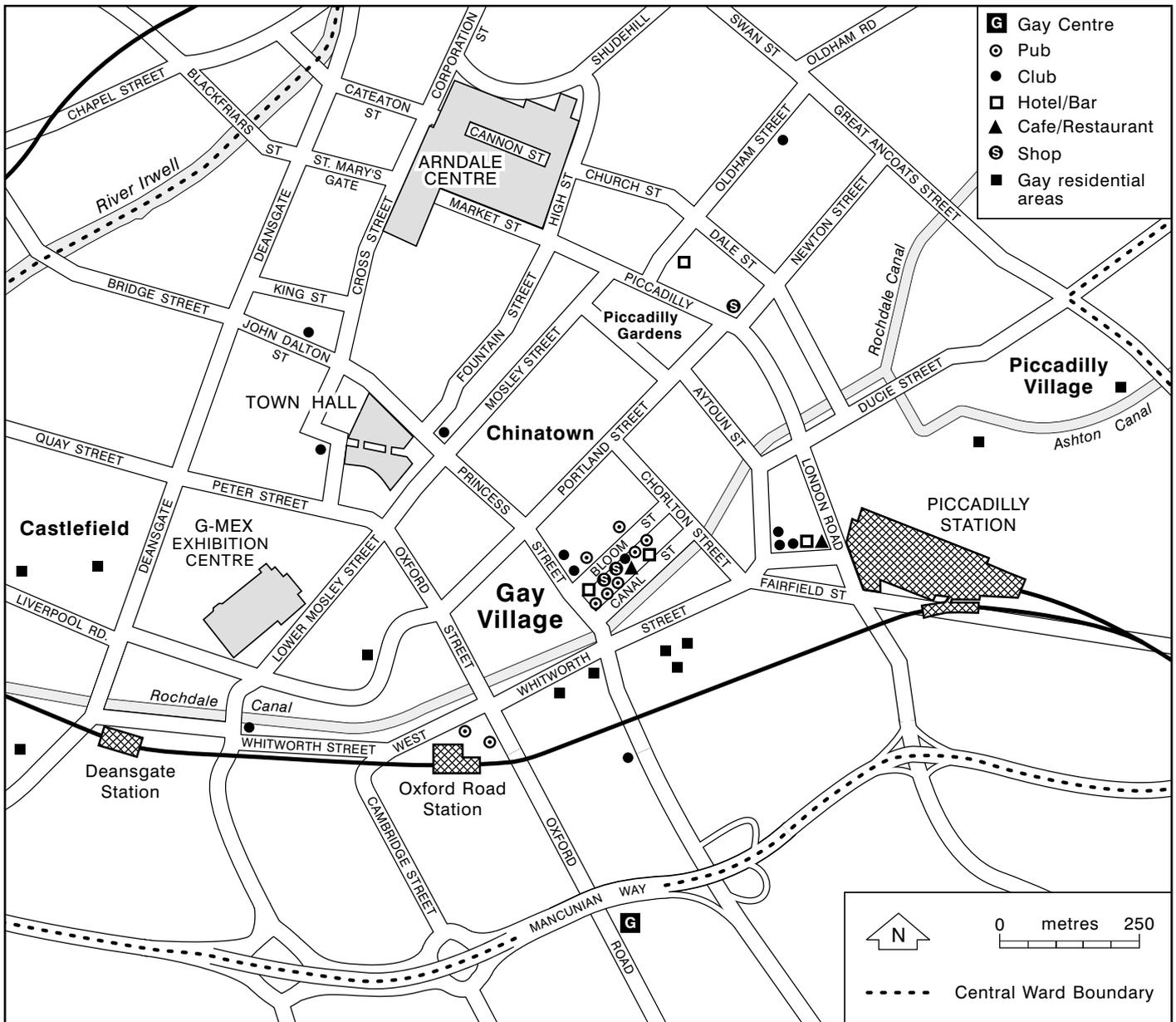


Figure 1: Manchester city centre.

This growth continued despite the concurrent rise of HIV and AIDS. The Village could have become a ghetto, but it did not, and has been described as a 'gay developed area' (Quilley 1995). It grew as part of Manchester's strategy to bring jobs back into the city, and to create a cosmopolitan 24-hour city. The Gay Village is now an important focal point of the city's night-time economy; the Council thinks that it competes with Amsterdam, rather than London, for gay tourism. It was not the gay activists of the early/mid 1980s who created the Gay Village, but the gay and straight² entrepreneurs of the last ten years; here the pink economy is alive and well.

The Gay Village now has two dozen gay bars and clubs, and over a dozen gay businesses. The

Village includes a doctor's surgery, two solicitors, a gym, a sauna, two hairdressers, taxi firms, a cafe, a gay goods shop, restaurants, and a shopping mall. In addition, several community and health groups exist and meet locally. The image of the area has changed from the inward-looking, hidden world of the 1960s and 1970s, to one which flaunts itself on the streets, especially along the now famous Canal Street in summer:

... Cafe-Bars such as Manto, with their goldfish bowl windows magnify and underline a gay presence, inviting scrutiny. They demand attention. (Quilley 1995, 38)

The area was used as the backdrop for the groundbreaking television series *Queer as Folk* in 1999, following the lives of three gay men; the whole

country was able to see images of the Gay Village. Perhaps the ultimate expression of the Gay Village is the annual Mardi Gras Lesbian and Gay Festival, which fills the streets over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Throughout the year the area has developed a gay community where people can live, work, meet, shop, act and play (Hindle 1994).

Migration

Thus not only has the area become a place for gay recreation, it was becoming evident that many gay people had migrated to Manchester, and increasingly into the core area itself. This latter flow was unique in Britain; London's gay scene is bigger, but is spread out across the city, as are the places where gay men live (Kelley *et al.* 1996). Kelley found that three quarters of their sample of (predominantly white) gay men in London did not grow up there; that, once there, they moved around London frequently with no allegiance to a particular area. Sampling in pubs and clubs, over half of their sample was in the age range 26-35. On the other hand, a recent survey of life in Manchester virtually ignores the fact that gay men live in the city centre (Taylor *et al.* 1996)

A report was compiled for English Partnerships in 1998 which aimed 'to examine the growing city centre living phenomenon in Manchester and to report on its sustainability, its contribution to regeneration and its need for public funding support.' (DTZ Piedad Consulting 1998, iii). Despite noting that 57% of households were single person households, and that males outnumbered females by two to one, the

consultants clearly failed to ask respondents about their sexuality, or to mention it much in their report, even in the section on gender. It is not until near the end of the report that there is a whole sentence dealing with 'the attraction of the Gay Village':

The key attraction of the Gay Village, to its predominantly gay residents, was seen as its excellent location among a range of cultural and other facilities serving this section of the population. (DTZ Piedad Consulting 1998, 74).

They presented no evidence that gay residents 'predominated'; as we will see later, gays, although present in significant numbers, are not the main element of the population. Another question they neglected to ask was whether any of the residences were second homes.

The origins of the present survey began with a study of just over 1000 households in the Register of Electors in the core area of Manchester, which suggested that about half the households (45%) consisted of single males (Hindle 1994). Such households account for only 11% of households in Greater Manchester (Census of Population 1991). This unusual feature was the spur to find out more about these households³; who are the single males, how many are gay, where did they come from, when and why? The key result was that, of the males who responded to the questionnaire, 46% were gay. It is not unreasonable to infer that, as roughly half the households in the core area were sampled, about one quarter of all households here are gay male households. This is quite different to the observation of Winchester and White that '... homosexual groups do

Table 1: Characteristics of gay and straight male survey respondents (1997-8), whole city centre population (local census 1996) and all males in Central Ward (Census 1991).

	Gay males (1997-98)	Straight males (1997-98)	City Centre male and female (1996)	Central Ward males (1991)
Age				
20-29	21	39	26	16
30-39	48	27	24	14
60+	0	12	20	20
0-19 and 40-59	27	22	30	50
Home ownership				
Second home	12	29	not asked	not asked
Household composition				
Single person	64	82	57	not asked
Use Gay Village				
Visited gay pubs	100	40	not asked	not asked

not generally form visible concentrations in residential space ...' (1988, 45)

The age range of the 1997-98 migrant respondents was very narrow, and certainly quite different to that of males in Central Ward in 1991 (Table 1). The figures for males in Central Ward (as a whole) in the 1991 Census can be taken to represent conditions before most of the recent migration into the city centre began. About two-thirds of the total sample was aged 20-39, (Central Ward males: 30%); but 48% of gay men were aged 30-39 (Central Ward males: 14%), and there were no gay men over 60 (Central Ward males: 20%). Straight men in the survey had a wider age spread than gay men; more were in their 20s or over 60.

The reasons given for moving to Manchester varied greatly between the gay and straight groups; straight men came to be close to work (40% of all reasons given) and amenities/city life (37%); none came because of the existence of the Gay Village (Table 2). Gay respondents, on the other hand, came principally for the amenities and city life (49%), then for work (19%), and when asked specifically whether the Gay Village had been important/very important in their decision to move, 77% said yes. A gay respondent commented:

The biggest pull factors are the newness of property, and closeness to places of entertainment. (Nurse, 30s)

However, a straight respondent added:

Whilst there is a significant gay community in central Manchester, it seems to me ... that there are better reasons to live here than the availability of gay facilities. A city centre bachelor pad is just as effective for straight men. (Legal practitioner, 20s)

There was little difference between gay and straight men in housing tenure; both were about 63% owner-occupied and 37% rented. The accommodation was a second home for 29% of straight men; a surprisingly high figure, and a feature missed by the DTZ Pinda Consulting Report. Presumably, many of them were using their Manchester accommodation during the week, and going to their other home at weekends. On the other hand, only 12% of gay men had another home. Rather curiously, more straight men had only one person in the household (82%), compared to gay men (64%) – (Table 1). This is perhaps partly explained by the fact that 71% of gay men had a current relationship, a person who might not have been entered in the Register of Electors. In fact, the Register had suggested that 90% of the households selected were occupied by only one adult.

The gay men were certainly an 'out' group; 95% were out to friends, 75% out at work, and 61% out to family. There was little difference in the employment patterns between the two groups; two-thirds were in fulltime employment. Work was not the prime motive for gay men to move to the city centre. An unusual feature was the high number of gay teachers and academics (20% of gay men who were in employment).

One in twelve of the replies were from females (all of whom were straight); this indicates changes of occupier (from the identified males) in the 8 months since the qualifying dates of the Register. This suggests a high total turnover of occupiers.

Change

One feature which many gay men (and women) hoped the Gay Village would provide was the creation of a safe space, a confident secure inner city regeneration zone, free from hassle from straight men. Straight women found the area safe too. Gay men felt proud of the area, felt they belonged; it had vitality. The predominant market for the Gay Village is young(er) (white) men with money to spend, who like to drink and party. The area provides meeting places other than pubs and clubs for men to meet, whether for socialising or for sex; there are community and interest groups, saunas and cruising areas (Truman and Keenaghan 1996). It has never really been a place for lesbians, though there are bars and clubs which cater for them. However, as Valentine (1993) has noted, lesbians often use other venues (such as homes) to meet and socialise.

Table 2: Main reasons for migrating to city centre Manchester, gay and straight male survey respondents (1997-8).

Reason for move	Column percentages	
	Gay males	Straight males
Work	19	40
Amenities/city life	49	37
Gay Village	77	0

But it is changing, as straight men see it as safe and trendy, an area to go and see. Some newer bars are 'mixed', and are becoming too straight for many gays; some gay people (especially older gay men and lesbians) are refused entry now if they do not look right, or do not wear the right gear. Most gay men are not rich, young, white and beautiful and the scene is starting to exclude them. Among the marginalised groups are lesbians, ethnic minorities and older gay men. The changing nature of the Village came out clearly from the comments of most of the gay men interviewed (all of whom were city centre residents):

There are more straights, the place is more drink orientated. Prices have risen and hetties have exploded in numbers making chatting up more difficult. Straights are coming in as it's a safe, clean, open space where you can relax.

(Unemployed, 25)

The invasion of naffs into the Village will dilute the gayness. We need more Mancunian Queens to come in, and stop moaning about the scene being lost.

(Engineer, 41)

The entrance to Prague V says: "This is a gay space; respect it", but 75% who use it are straight!

(Teacher, 47)

The Gay Village is becoming increasingly heterosexual and violent; I spend less and less time in the village.

(Doctor, 30s)

I am very unhappy the way the gay village is going ... I do not visit as often as I would like ... A number of my friends have the same feeling that the village has been promoted as the Village and not the Gay Village, at weekends it is very hetero.

(Sales Representative, 30s)

This change is a basic issue; an area which grew as one segregated by and for gays is now having to contemplate integration, whilst some gays are clearly perceiving the area as being less welcoming. The area is reshaping itself as straight men become more

prominent. Similar changes are clearly not happening in the gay areas of Amsterdam or San Francisco. The reason may be that Manchester's Gay Village was originally developed by entrepreneurs who were interested in the pink pound, but who are now equally happy to relieve anyone of their money. On the broader front, what these changes imply for the future patterns of migration to the city centre by gay men is unclear; it is most likely that fewer gay men will migrate here in the next decade.

Conclusion

Migration back into the city centre is a relatively new phenomenon; it is a key factor in residential renewal. The migrants are generally young and single, attracted by the city centre lifestyle. The efforts of public and private bodies to redevelop Manchester city centre over the past two decades have made it a much more vibrant area. A key element of this has been the gentrification of the core area through the provision of many new housing units. Alongside this, the emerging Gay Village attracted gay men, first to play in the city centre, and then to live and work there, to the extent that a gay community has emerged. Gay men form a significant component (about one quarter) of the recent migration of people into the city centre. The migration can be regarded as a pioneer settlement of the city centre by young people, many of whom are male and gay. However, the future of this migration may be limited by the space available for the creation of new residences. The gay component of this migration is more uncertain; it will depend on whether the Gay Village continues to be an attractive force, or whether the recent straight invasion makes the area less attractive to gay men.

Notes

- 1 Central ward includes the whole of the city centre from Castlefield in the south-west, to Miles Platting in the north-east; the latter area has substantial areas of council housing.
2. 'Straight' is a term used mainly by gays; the terms 'gay' and 'straight' are used throughout as convenient shorthand for sexual orientation, rather than 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual'.
3. The Register of Electors was used as the sampling frame; it omits those under seventeen, but there are few people of that age in the core area. Student residences, and flats in Chinatown were not included. Another problem was that some people have only initials rather than first names on the list, making it impossible to determine their sex. A core area of new housing developments was defined within Central ward, stretching along the Rochdale Canal from Piccadilly Village through to Castlefield, containing around 1000 households. The area closest to the Gay Village was studied in 1997; it contained 10 blocks of flats (most converted from commercial use), with a total of 528 households. Within that group, questionnaires were sent to 266 households which appeared to have only one or two males. In 1998 a further 228 households were selected in the Castlefield and Piccadilly Village areas (out of 454 households), plus a resample of the core area where new names had appeared on the next Register. Overall, almost half the households appeared to be occupied by one or two males. The response rate to the questionnaire was 27%; thus there is some chance that data are biased, but the total number of responses (132) should mean that the data are reasonably representative. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they would be available for an in-depth interview; 13 were completed.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the Manchester Geographical Society for providing funds for this research. In particular, the author must thank his two research assistants, John Knox (1997) and Mark Vipond (1998). Thanks are also due to Chris Law for reading an early draft, and to the Editor of this journal and two referees for their comments.

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